



Should Polycythemia Vera Patients Avoid Vitamin K?

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Andrew Schorr:

Here's a question from Denise. Denise says, "I have PV, and I'm trying to improve my health by making smoothies containing large amounts of dark green vegetables, such as spinach, kale and watercress. I've been warned by some members of our community that these foods will increase iron and raise the hematocrit, putting me at risk. Is that true? And should people with PV avoid these foods that are high in vitamin K?"

Dr. Pemmaraju:

Well, this is an important question and I remember five to 10 years ago we would say things like, "Well, we don't really know the answer," or you know, "Diet doesn't really have anything to do." But now with more and more understanding of the total therapy for patients and approach to the whole body, I think this is an important question. So, yes, iron levels do matter. Too low, then you're iron deficient. (That can definitely happen in our patients.) Too high, potentially may fuel the fire, if you will, for polycythemia vera.

So, I think iron levels are important to watch and certainly can be increased by what our question is being asked about. But there's another aspect, too, that some of the medications that we prescribe and take. One example is Coumadin, or warfarin that a lot of our patients know, which is a high-level blood thinner. It's an anticoagulant. And man, oh, man, that is exquisitely dependent on the vitamin K pathway. So sensitive, that in some patients in some cases even salad consumption, or spinach, so healthy foods because of the vitamin K level in them can alter this level. It's called the INR. And so, it's something we have to watch out for.

So, not only in terms of iron metabolites, but also drug-to-drug interactions. So, it is always best to mention these things when we're going on new medications.

Andrew Schorr:

Right. Talk to your doctor.

Dr. Pemmaraju:

Talk to your doctor.

Thank you all for spending time today, sharing your knowledge with us and hopefully inspiring some others.

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